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ABSTRACT

The materials presented here contain information about Cajun history, demography, language, music, and song. They include: a list of significant dates and events in Cajun history, from 1604 to 1990; maps indicating Cajun parishes in Louisiana and settlement areas in 1790 and 1981; notes on Cajun French, including distinctions between it and Louisiana and Creole French and some details of phonology, morphology, and borrowing; an article in Cajun, with translation in standard French, on being Cajun in America; notes on the characteristics and evolution of Cajun music; lyrics of some popular songs; a discography of traditional Cajun recordings; and a brief bibliography of works on Cajun topics. (MSE)

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ED 385 121

THE CAJUNS:

THEIR HISTORY, CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND SONG

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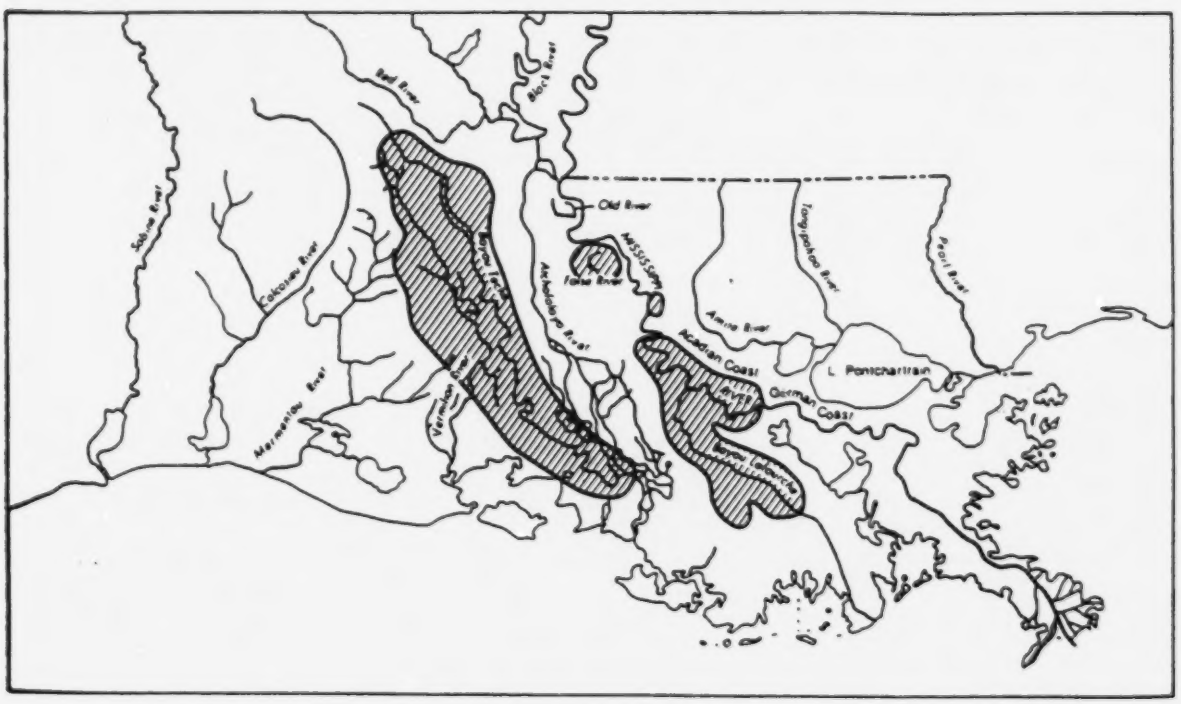
SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN CAJUN HISTORY

1604	Founding of l'Acadie (Nova Scotia, Canada)
1713	Treaty of Utrecht Makes the Acadians British Citizens
1755-65	Acadian Expulsion (Grand Dérangement)
1765-85	First Acadian Settlements in Louisiana
1880	Railroad from New Orleans to Houston
1920s	Governor Huey Long's Public Works Program
1930s	Development of the Oil Fields
1940s	World War II
1960s	Civil Rights and Ethnic Pride Movements
1974	Cajun Heritage and Music Festival (Festivals Acadiens)
1990	400,000 Residents of Cajun Ancestry Listed in U.S. Census of Louisiana

From Ancelet et al. Cajun Country.

Map 3. Parishes of Louisiana by name (Drafted by Ada Newton)

Map 4. Acadian Settlement Areas ca. 1790 (Based on data from *An Essay on Lower Louisiana* by Stephen Duplantier)



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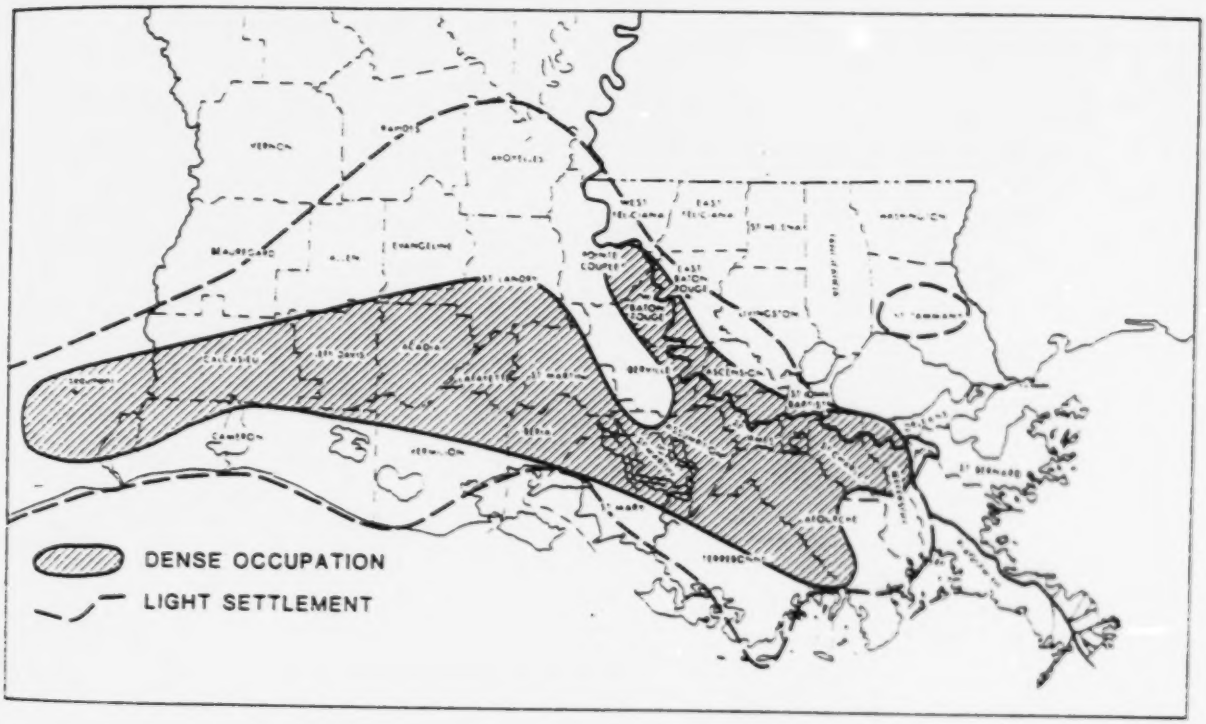
From Ancelet et al. Cajun Country.



Map 10. The Acadian population in 1981 (Redrafted from An Atlas of Louisiana Surnames of French and Spanish Origin by Robert C. West)

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CAJUN FRENCH

French is spoken in daily life and has survived through oral transmission even after three centuries of separation from France. A large number of Louisianans speak French--some say 1.5 million persons.

Three Varieties of French Spoken in Louisiana:

1) Louisiana French--similar to standard French but incorporates some structures and vocabulary from Acadian French. It is spoken by older people educated in religious schools.

2) Acadian French--the most widespread. A langue commune developed by French colonists who spoke a different patois.

3) Creole French--the least widespread and an ever-diminishing variety of French. Phonetic, syntactical and grammatical systems have been simplified also known as " Negro French" or "Gumbo French."

All three are almost exclusively spoken, rather than written French.

All three have maintained certain archaic French forms and pronunciations.

All three use regional French words from areas in France quite remote from one another so it is difficult to identify the origins of the French who settled in Louisiana.

Acadian French

Not a dialect but rather a common language which has assimilated certain elements of other dialects and on the whole resembles the French spoken in rural areas of northern and western France. It does not vary much from one Acadian parish to another.

1. Archaic forms: s'assir for s'asseoir (to sit down), balier for balayer (to sweep), faire le lavage for faire la lessive (to do the laundry). Old pronunciation of /a-u/ for août /û/ (August) and boëte for boîte (box).

2. Phonetic accidents:
   a) metathesis: fourmi became fromi (ant); fermer became frémer (to close); fourbir became frobir (to scrub).
   b) assimilation: cimetière became cimitiere (cemetery); labourer became rabourer (to plow).
   c) dissimilation: calculer became carculer (to calculate); imaginer became émaginer (to imagine).
   d) agglutination: le hoquet became le l'hoquet (hiccup); l'endroit became le l'endroit (right side).

3. Borrowings from other languages:
   a) English: back le char for mettre la voiture en marche; arriere (back up the car); truck for camion.

   b) African: name-name for manger, ouanga for sort, envoutement (spell, hex).

   c) Indian: bayou for ruisseau, rivière; chaoui for raton; laveur (raccoon).

   d) Spanish: bossal from bozal for licol (halter); brème from berenja for aubergine (eggplant).

4. Simplification of Acadian grammar:
   Verbs: donner (to give) -- je donne / ti donnes / il/alle donne / On donne / Vous donne / Ça donne.

Auxiliary verbs are also simplified. The verb avoir (to have) has three phonetic forms: j'ai, t'as, il a/alle a/, on a, vous /a/ il{s} ont, the last being used for both ils ont and elles ont. Etre (to be) also has three phonetic forms: je suis, ils sont (for both ils sont and elles sont), and /é/ for the other persons: t'es, il est, alle est, on est, vous /é/.

Aller (to go) also has three phonetic forms: va: je vas, ti vas, il va/alle va, on va, vous /va/, ça va.

For more information about Cajun French, see the essay entitled "The Spoken French of Louisiana," pp. 145-155 in The Cajuns, Essays on Their History and Culture in the accompanying bibliography.

From Galanti, M.E. et al. Voix et Visages du Monde Français. Level 2. Rand McNally: Chicago, 1976.

Problème de nationalité

par Antonine Maillet

Antonine Maillet est une Acadienne du Nouveau-Brunswick. Elle a beaucoup écrit au sujet de la tragédie des Acadiens et ici elle explique, dans la langue du peuple, la difficulté pour l'Acadien de définir[1] sa nationalité.

—Je vivons en Amarique, ben je sons pas des Amaricains. Non, les Amaricains, ils travaillont dans des shops aux États, pis ils s'en venont se promener par icitte sus nos côtes, l'été, en culottes blanches pis en parlant anglais. Pis ils sont riches, les Amaricains, j'en sons point. Nous autres je vivons au Canada; ça fait que je devons putôt être des Canadjens, ça me r'semble.

—Ben ça se peut pas non plus, parce que les Dysart, pis les Caroll, pis les MacFadden, c'est pas des genses de notre race, ça, pis ça vit au Canada itou. Si i'sont des Canadjens, je pouvons pas en être, nous autres. Par rapport qu'ils sont des Anglais, pis nous autres, je sons des Français.

—Non, je sons pas tout à fait des Français, je pouvons pas dire ça: les Français, c'est les Français de France. Ah! pour ça, je sons encore moins des Français de France que des Amaricains. Je sons putôt des Canadjens français, qu'ils nous avont dit.

—Ça se peut pas non plus, ça. Les Canadjens français, c'est du monde qui vit à Québec. Ils les appelont des Canayens, ou ben des Québécois. Ben coument c'est que je pouvons être des Québécois si je vivons point à Québec?... Pour l'amour de Djeu, où c'est que je vivons, nous autres?

—En Acadie, qu'ils nous avont dit, et je sons des Acadjens.

© Lemeac 1971

—Nous vivons en Amérique, mais nous ne sommes pas des Américains. Non, les Américains, ils travaillent dans des usines aux États-Unis, et ils viennent se promener par ici, sur nos côtes, l'été, en culottes[2] blanches et en parlant anglais. Puis, ils sont riches, les Américains, nous ne le sommes point. Nous autres, nous vivons au Canada; alors nous devons plutôt être des Canadiens, il me semble.

—Bien, ce n'est pas possible non plus, parce que les Dysart, les Caroll et les MacFadden, ce ne sont pas des gens de notre race, mais ils vivent au Canada aussi. Si ce sont des Canadiens, nous ne pouvons pas en être, nous autres. Parce que ce sont des Anglais, et nous autres, nous sommes des Français.

—Non, nous ne sommes pas tout à fait des Français, je ne peux pas dire ça: les Français, ce sont les Français de France. Ah, pour ça, nous sommes encore moins des Français de France que des Américains! Nous sommes plutôt des Canadiens français, c'est ce qu'ils nous ont dit.

—C'est aussi impossible, ça. Les Canadiens français c'est du monde qui vit à Québec. Ils s'appellent des Canayens ou bien des Québécois. Bien, comment est-ce que nous pourrions être des Québécois si nous ne vivons pas à Québec?... Pour l'amour de Dieu, où est-ce que nous vivons, nous autres?

—En Acadie, c'est ce qu'ils nous ont dit, et nous sommes des Acadiens.

1. définir: *to define* 2. la culotte: *pair of pants*

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CAJUN MUSIC

(Based on B. Ancelet, "Cajun Music: Its Roots and Development," in The Cajuns. Essays on Their History and Culture. See the accompanying bibliography.)

Cajun music is a Louisiana hybrid of American Indian, Scots-Irish, Spanish, German, Afro-American, and Afro-Caribbean influences on a base of French folk tradition. It differs greatly from the music of its sister cultures in Quebec and Acadia.

The hardships of the Acadians in trying to re-establish their society in Nouvelle Acadie and their isolation imbued their music with a preocupation with death, lost love, and a mournful quality, especially in the instrumentation.

Influences:

Indian--wailing singing style and new rhythms
African--the blues, percussion, improvisational singing
Anglo-American--new fiddle tunes, square dance, Virginia reels
Spanish--guitar ("J'ai passé devant ta porte," a melody from a concierto by the 18th-century composer Fernando Sors)
West Indian--Caribbean slave yncopation
German Jews--diatonic accordion

At the turn of the century Cajun music had more variety in song forms than it has today: waltzes, contredances, varsoviennes, polkas, mazurkas, two-steps, one-steps.

Creole blues was a strong influence. Amédée Ardoin developed new ways of playing the accordion with syncopated style and powerful singing. He was among the first to record with Dennis McGee. His accordion style influenced zydeco and was refined by Clifton Chenier. ("Eunice Two-Step," "99 Years Waltz," " Blues de la Prison")

Joe Falcon's "Allons à Lafayette" was the first recorded Cajun song released in 1928 and, typically, a new song adapted from an earlier tune. The accordion was becoming the mainstay of the Cajun band and had a limiting influence on the development of the music. It simplified Cajun music and songs it could not play disappeared. The fiddle had a secondary role, playing duet accompaniments or percussive seconding.

The Victrola and radio enhanced the popularity of certain performers and provided new ideas for Cajun songwriters.
("La valse de Belisaire" is from Roy Acuff's "A Precious Jewel.")
By the mid 30's Cajuns were becoming Americanized. Slick radio programming undermined the relatively unpolished Cajun sounds and the accordion faded in popularity as it became unavailable due to restrictions with trade with Germany.

Western Swing and bluegrass influence entered from Tennessee and Texas. The new leaders were the Hackberry Ramblers, who are still playing today. Because of the introduction of amplification, drums, and the steel guitar, the fiddle developed a lighter, more lilting style, no longer so mournful as before. Harry Choates, a Cajun who performed the "Port Arthur Blues" with a grand Texas theme, had lived in that city while working in the oil fields and shipyards. Iry LeJeune revived old style accordion playing with his "Lovebridge Waltz." This sound appealed to the nostalgia of returning GIs ready to immerse themselves again in their culture. In the early 50s, however, rock and roll made inroads in Cajun music and Doug Kershaw appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show and sang in English.

In the 1960s, the Newport Folk Foundation heard of Alan Lomax's work in French Louisiana. Lomax was asked to find Cajun musicians to perform in the 1964 Folk Festival. Among that group was Dewey Balfa, who played fiddle in a traditional, unamplified style. The band was well received with a standing ovation. He returned to Louisiana and worked until his death in 1992 to preserve the language, culture and music of Acadiana. In 1968, cultural and musical renewal were recognized with the formation of CODOFIL, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana.

In 1974, the first Tribute to Cajun Music took place in Lafayette. Cajun musicians such as Dewey Balfa (fiddle), Nathan Abshire (accordion) and D.L. Menard (guitar) became cultural heroes and attracted young musicians. In 1977, Dewey Balfa received a Folk Artists in the School grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Today several talented younger Cajun musicians have taken the stage. Michael Doucet studied with traditional fiddler Dennis McGee and incorporates jazz, rock, zydeco, and Caribbean influences with traditional ones. Marc Savoy has influenced a generation of accordionists. Steve Riley and Peter Schwarz of the Mamou Playboys, both of whom studied with Dewey Balfa, continue his legacy of teaching Cajun music to a wide audience at music camps such as Augusta in West Virginia.

TOUT UN BEAU SOIR EN ME PROMENANT
(Cajun "Chanson en reponse" collected in 1934 by Alan Lomax)

TOUT UN BEAU SOIR EN ME PROMENANT
OH, TOUT LE LONGUE DU PETIT BOIS CHARMANT.
[REPEAT]

GARDE, JE VOIS LA-BAS, JE VOIR VENIR UNE BERGERE.
ÇA ME FAIT RAPPELER DE LA SEULE QUE MON COEUR AIME.
[REPEAT]

BELLE BERGERE, JOLIE BERGERE,
DE QUOI VOUS FAITES DEDANS CES BOIS?
[REPEAT]

J'AI MES MOUTONS DEDANS CES PLAINES
ET OU LE LOUP ME FAIT SOUVENT D'OUVRAGE.
[REPEAT]

LES BEAUX BUCHERS, ILS SONT PARTIS-Z-AU BOIS.
C'EST POUR COUPER LA FLEUR DU BOIS.
[REPEAT]

NE COUPEZ PAS NI LA SOUCHE NI LA RETRAITE
VOUS GOUTERREZ DU VIN DANS MES BOUTEILLES.
[REPEAT]

OH, BUVONS UNE, OH, BUVONS DEUX,
OH, BUVONS TROIS, OH, S'IL LE FAUT.
[REPEAT]

(English Translation)

Oh, one beautiful evening when I am walking
along a charming little wood.
Look, I see over there a shepherdess coming
who reminds me of the only one my heart loves.
"Lovely shepherdess, pretty shepherdess,
why are you out here in the forest?"
"I have my sheep here on the plain
and the wolf often makes work for me."
The handsome woodsmen have gone into the wood.
It's to cut the the flower of the forest.
"Don't cut either the stump or the regrowth.
Drink some wine from my bottles."
"Oh, let's drink one. Oh, let's drink two.
Oh, let's drink three, if it's necessary."

(A) **LYRICS OF SOME POPULAR CAJUN SONGS**

DIGGY LIGGY LO
C'est ma soeur, Diggy Liggy La
Elle s'est mariée avec Diggy Liggy Lo
Pour rester dans le village
Diggy Liggy Lo et Diggy Liggy La.

Diggy Liggy Lo 'trappe Po Po
Diggy Liggy La tombe sur le plombeau
Pour s'en va tout par tout
Diggy Liggy Lo et Diggy Liggy La.

DIGGY LIGGY LO
Diggy Liggy La is my sister
She married Diggy Liggy Lo
So she could live in town
Diggy Liggy Lo and Diggy Liggy La.

Diggy Liggy Lo catches Po Po the horse
Diggy Liggy La falls on the saddle horn
To go ride around everywhere
Diggy Liggy Lo and Diggy Liggy La.

Blues de Port Arthur

Tu m'as dit hier au soir
Tu pouvais plus revenir,
Plus t'en revenir pour me rejoindre à la maison.
O yaïe.

Moi, je vois pas qui je t'ai fait,
Quoi faire donc tu veux pas
T'en revenir au Port Arthur.
O yaïe.

You told me last night
You couldn't come back,
Couldn't come home to meet me.

I don't see what I've done to you,
Why then don't you want,
To come home to Port Arthur.

J'ai Passé Devant Ta Porte
(I Passed Before Your Door)

J'ai passé devant ta porte
J'ai crié, Bye bye, à la belle
Il y a personne que m'a pas répondu,
Oh yé yaïe, mon coeur fait mal.

Quant j'étais cogné à la porte
Quand ils ont va ouvert la porte
Oh, j'ai vu les chandelles allumées
Tout le tour de ton cerceuil.

I Passed Before Your Door

I passed before your door,
I cried farewell to my girl,
There was no one to answer me,
Oh yé yaïe, that broke my heart.

When I knocked at the door
When they opened it to me,
Oh, I saw all the bright candles lit
All around your casket.

Jolie Blonde de Bayou
(Pretty Blonde of the Bayou)

Jolie blonde, ma chère 'tit fille
Gardez-donc qu'à t'après faire,
Après me laisser moi tout seul dans les misères —
Quel espoir pour l'avenir que mon j'peut avoir?

Jolie blonde, tu croyais
Il avait juste toi dedans le pays —
Il y a pas juste toi dans tout le pays que mon j'peut aimer —
T'es la seule que mon j'voudrais dessus le bayou.

Pretty Blonde of the Bayou

Pretty blonde, my dear little girl,
Look at what you have done,
Left me all alone in misery,
What hope for the future can I have?

Pretty blonde, you thought
That in all the country there was only you.
You're not the only one in the country I could love,
But you're the only one that I want on the bayou.

THE KAPLAN WALTZ

O, mon je m'en va's, mon je m'en va's á grand Kaplan
Tu m'as laissé dans les misères.
Tu m'as laissé, ouais, là-bas grand Kaplan.

O, tous les soirs, quand je m'endors, dans mes rêves
Ça me ressemble que je vois
Tes chers 'tits yeux après me guetter à grand Kaplan, y yaïe.

THE KAPLAN WALTZ

Oh, I'm going, I'm going to big Kaplan
You left me in misery
You left me over in big Kaplan.

Oh, every night, when I'm tired, in my dreams
It seems to me that I see
Your dear little eyes watching me in big Kaplan.

FLAMMES D'ENFER

Ma vieille maman, mais, m'a tout le temps dit
Tu vas brailler, bébé, quand tu seras grand
Tu vas trouver un' jolie fille
Qui va le canailler pour faire un bon temps

(Chorus)
O, chère bébé, priez pour mon,
Sauvez mon me des flammes d'enfer
O, chère bébé, priez pour mon,
Sauvez mon me de les flammes d'enfer.

Quand je va's mourir enterre mon pas,
Enterre mon pas dans la cimitière,
Mais enterre mon dans le coin de ton cours,
Mais dans le de la cours de ton Papa.

THE FLAMES OF HELL

My old mama always told me,
You're gonna' cry baby when you grow up
You're gonna' find a pretty girl
Who is going to fool you into having a good time

(Chorus)
Oh, dear baby, pray for me
Save my soul from the flames of hell
Oh, dear baby, pray for me
Save my soul from the flames of hell.

When I die don't bury me,
Don't bury me in the cemetery
But bury me in the corner of your yard
In the yard of your Dad.

La Porte dans Arrière

Moi et la belle on avait été-z-au bal,
On a passé dans tous les honky-tonks —
S'en ont revenus lendemain matin,
Le jour était après se casser —
J'ai passé dedans la porte dans arrière.

L'après-midi moi j'étais au village,
Et je m'ai soûlé que je pouvais plus marcher —
Ils m'ont ramené back à la maison,
Il y avait de la compagnie, c'était du monde étranger—
J'ai passé dedans la porte dans arrière.

Mon vieux père un soir quand j'arrivais,
Il essayais de changer mon idée —
Je l'ai pas écouté, mon j'avais trop la tête dure
"Un jour à venir, mon nègre, tu vas avoir de regret
T'as passé dedans la porte dans arrière."

J'ai eu un tas d'amis tant que j'avais de l'argent;
À cette heure j'ai plus d'argent, mais ils voulont plus me voir.
J'ai été dans le village, et moi je m'ai mis dans le tracas,
La loi m'a ramassé, moi je suis parti dans la prison,
On va passer dedans la porte dans arrière.

The Back Door

We went to the dance, my girl and me,
We passed through all the honky-tonks.
We got ourselves home the next morning,
The day was just about to break,
I went in through the back door.

I went to town this afternoon,
I got myself so drunk I couldn't walk any more,
They led me back home,
We had company there from out of town,
I went in through the back door.

One night when I came home
My old father tried to straighten me out.
I paid no attention, my head was too thick,
He said, "One day to come, mon nègre[1], you'll have to regret
You came in through the back door."

I had many a friend while I had money,
Now that there's no more they'd rather not see me.
I went to town and got into a brawl,
The cops hauled me in and now I'm off to jail —
We'll go in through the back door!

1. "Mon nègre:" a common expression (untranslateable) of sympathy and identification.

DISCOGRAPHY: TEN OF THE BEST TRADITIONAL CAJUN RECORDINGS

(What follows is our personal listing of ten of the best Cajun recordings. Most are available either as tapes or CDs. A well-known supplier of Cajun recordings, videos and music is Floyd's Records, P.O. Drawer 10, Ville Platte, LA 70586.)

Collections

Cajun Music and Zydeco. Rounder 11572 (See companion text to this recording listed in the select bibliography.)

Cajun Social Music. Smithsonian Folkways SF 40006

Major Artists & Bands

The Best of Nathan Abshire. Swallow 6061

The Balfa Brothers Play Traditional Cajun Music, Vols. I & II. Swallow 6011

The Balfa Brothers. The New York Concerts. Swallow 6037.

Dewey Balfa, Marc Savoy and D.L. Menard. Underneath the Green Oak Tree. Arhoolie 5019.

Michael Doucet with Beausoleil. Arhoolie 5034.

D.L. Menard and the Louisiana Aces. Rounder 6003

Savoy-Doucet Cajun Band. Two-step D'Amédé. Arhoolie 316.

Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys. Rounder 6038.

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS ON CAJUN TOPICS

Ancelet, Barry J., Jay Edwards, Glen Pitre. Cajun Country. University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, 1991. If you can read only one book about the Cajuns it should be this one. It is very informative, very readable with interesting photos. There are chapters on history, social institutions, food, architecture, music and games.

Ancelet, Barry J. Cajun Music. Its Origins and Development. Center for Lousiana Studies, USL: Lafayette, 1989. A brief overview by the acknowledged expert in the field.

Conrad, Glenn R., ed. The Cajuns. Essays on their History and Culture. Center for Louisiana Studies, USL: Lafayette,.1983. Scholarly essays on history, folklore, music, architecture and politics.

Daigle, Pierre V. Tears, Love and Laughter. The Story of the Cajuns and their Music. Cajun music from the personal perspective of a friend of many of the musicians.

Dormon, James H. The People called Cajuns. An Introduction to an Ethnohistory. Center for Louisiana Studies, USL: Lafayette, 1983. A very informative scholarly work on the ethnic development of the Louisiana Cajuns.

François, Raymond E. Yé Yaille, Chère! Traditional Cajun Dance Music. Thunderstone Press: Lafayette, 1990. This is termed "The Yellow Book" by Cajun musicians. 500 pages of music and lyrics, along with the author's anecdotes about the musicians who performed these works.

Gould, Philip, intro. by Barry J. Ancelet. Cajun Music and Zydeco. Louisiana State Press: Baton Rouge, 1992. Companion text to the recording of the same title listed in the discography. A stunning collection of photographs of the best-known Cajun and zydeco musicans of the past decade, and southwest Louisiana where they perform.

Savoy, Ann A. Cajun Music. A Reflection of a People. Vol. I, Bluebird Press: Eunice, LA, 1984. A wonderful collection of Cajun songs, with photographs of the musicians, a brief history of Cajun music, and much more. The author, Ann Savoy, and her husband Marc are themselves recognized as outstanding Cajun musicians.

Severn, Rhonda. C. "Discovering Acadiana." 931 Montgomery Ave., Bryn Mawr, PA 19010. A collection of two videos and one audio cassette developed as a project for a Rockefeller Summer Grant in 1991. She also includes several articles and activities of interest to French teachers and their students.